Improving the Quality of Care for Millions of People Through Health IT

Health IT is transforming health care. Health IT includes the secure electronic sharing of health information between health care providers (such as a doctor and a hospital) using very strong privacy and security protections.

Health IT is also changing the way health-related information is gathered, stored, shared and used. Soon, it will make the entire health care system more efficient, effective and focused on meeting the needs of patients. The following are just a few ways health IT will benefit patients and consumers in Illinois and across the nation.

Health IT empowers people to participate more in their care by providing secure access to their medical information. It can help patients manage their illnesses or chronic conditions by sending automated reminders out about taking your medications or scheduling screenings like mammograms.

Health IT makes care more convenient by offering online appointment scheduling, appointment reminders and the convenience of communicating with your doctor through secure e-mail.

Health IT enables faster, better emergency care. When seconds make the difference, quick access to a patient's electronic health information about allergies, existing conditions and prescriptions can save lives and is especially helpful when the patient is unconscious and unable to speak.

Health IT reduces medical errors such as alerting doctors about dangerous drug interactions when they are prescribing electronically.

Health IT improves collaboration throughout the health care system. Multiple provider access to a person's electronic health record leads to an improved patient-centered coordinated care.

Health IT improves patient-care transitions such as a move from a hospital to a rehab facility by making sure that patients get the treatment and medicine they need without delays or mix-ups.

Health IT improves the response to public health emergencies and disasters. Electronic data can be used to understand and react to disease outbreaks in communities, allowing for a coordinated response. In disaster situations such as a tornado, it can give health care providers access to a patient's medical history that may no longer be available because they are now lost or damaged.

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Health IT, Improving the Quality of Care by Connecting Rural Communities in Illinois

Citizens living in rural areas in Illinois face many challenges just finding care because of a shortage of health care providers in the area to meet the demand.

The Illinois Rural HealthNet (IRHN) is a not-for-profit corporation of health care organizations that have come together to maintain a high-speed network to connect rural hospitals and health care clinics in Illinois. Over 80 rural health care facilities are being linked to each other and to larger urban medical centers that can help meet their needs. They can now electronically transmit medical files to specialists not available in the area, receive faster medical treatment, and lower the need for rural citizens to be sent to distant hospitals for care.

Especially important for rural communities, Health IT will also allow shared information between providers who may need to send patients from McLean to another Illinois community like Mount Vernon, St. Louis, Springfield or Chicago. The medical files can easily follow the patient from provider to provider anywhere in the state allowing each new provider a complete view of the patient's history. For more information about rural health in Illinois visit www.illinoisruralhealthnet.org

To better understand the importance of an electronic health record, it is important to know the kind of information it contains. An electronic health record could include some or all of the following information: contact information, medical insurance, medical history, diagnosis, medications, progress notes, immunization dates, allergies, radiology images, lab tests and results.

Conclusion:
Health IT will create many opportunities for improved patient access to health care, rapid access to critical health information in emergency situations and improved access to health care and better health outcomes for rural citizens throughout the state.

Information for Patients and Consumers

If you would like to learn more about health IT, read newsletters, fact sheets, patient stories, and more; visit www.hie.illinois.gov. For additional information and resources visit the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT at www.healthit.gov.

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